

### **Amendments to the Claims**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

### **Listing of Claims**

1. (Currently Amended) A process for preparing a fertilizer composition, comprising the following steps:

reacting a humified fossil material, which is selected from the group consisting of ~~comprising~~ leonardite, lignite, xylite and peat, in water in the presence of gluconic acid, wherein the gluconic acid is added to said fossil material in such a quantity so as to adjust the pH of the reaction medium to a value of less than 2.5; and

subsequently adding to the mixture an alkaline agent in such a quantity as to adjust the pH to a basic value.

2. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein the quantity of gluconic acid added, expressed as gluconic acid at 50% by weight, is from 3% to 10% by weight relative to the weight of the fossil material.

3. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1 wherein the alkaline agent is potassium hydroxide or ammonium hydroxide.

4. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein the alkaline agent is potassium hydroxide, added at a quantity of from 6% to 15% by weight relative to the weight of the fossil material, said quantity being expressed as potassium hydroxide at from 48-50% by weight.

5. (Cancelled)

6. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein step a) is carried out at a temperature not greater than 30°C.

7. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein step a) is continued for a time of from 2 to 4 hours with agitation, which is followed by an optional stationary period for a time of from 6 to 12 hours.

8. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein, in step b), agitation is continued for a time of from 6 to 12 hours, followed by an optional stationary period of up to 24 hours.

9. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, comprising the addition of macronutrient and micronutrient substances to the product of step b).

10. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 9, comprising the addition of urea in quantities of from 10% to 60% relative to the weight of the fossil material.

11. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 9 comprising the addition of plant extracts, ~~in particular extracts of castor beans and lupin seeds.~~

12. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein the product obtained by step b) is subjected to drying and granulation in order to produce a composition in granular form.

13. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 12, wherein the granular composition is mixed with super-absorbent polymer substances, ~~in particular derivatives of hydrolyzed starch,~~ for preparing a granular composition having a high level of water retention.

14. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein the product of step b) is subjected to filtration with separation of the liquid phase which is intended for use as a liquid fertilizer.

15. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 14, wherein the liquid phase obtained by the filtration is supplemented with urea in quantities of from 20% to 60% relative to the weight of the liquid phase.

16. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein the fossil material is a leonardite ore.

17. (Currently Amended) Fertilizer compositions in liquid form, which are ~~can be~~ obtained by ~~means of~~ the process according to claim 1.

18. (Currently Amended) Fertilizer compositions in granular form, which are ~~can be~~ obtained by ~~means of~~ the process according to claim 1.

19. (Currently Amended) A method of increasing plant growth, comprising administering an effective amount of the fertilizer composition of claim 18 to agricultural soils granular composition according to claim 18 wherein the composition is used as a fertilizer, in particular for increasing plant growth.

20. (Currently Amended) A method to increase fertility of agricultural soils or to decontaminate soils polluted by chemical products and/or toxic metal ions, comprising administering an effective amount of the fertilizer composition of claim 18 to agricultural soils granular composition according to claim 18 wherein the composition is used to increase the fertility of agricultural soils or to decontaminate soils polluted by chemical products and/or toxic metal ions.

21. (Currently Amended) A method of fertilizing, comprising administering an effective amount of the fertilizer composition of claim 17, wherein the fertilizer composition is administered by localized irrigation and/or by spraying leaves ~~liquid composition according to claim 17 wherein the composition is used to fertilize by localized irrigation and/or by spraying leaves.~~

22. (New) A process according to claim 11, wherein the plant extracts are extracts of castor beans and lupin seeds.

23. (New) A process according to claim 13, wherein the absorbent polymer substances are derivatives of hydrolyzed starch.